

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN 2001-2006

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Title 36 Idaho Code, declares fish and wildlife to be the property of the state of Idaho and mandates the Idaho Fish and Game Commission (Commission) to "preserve, protect, and perpetuate such wildlife and provide for the citizens of this state and as by law permitted to others, continued supplies of such wildlife for hunting, fishing, and trapping." Under the Commission's guidance, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department) manages the fish and wildlife of the state.

This fishery management plan describes the management direction, which the Department intends to pursue over the next five years in order to provide the continued supplies of fish and fishing opportunity as mandated by law. It describes overall Department and specific fisheries policies and sets forth major fisheries goals and objectives. In some cases, the management direction outlined in this plan is a continuation of long-established programs. In other cases, factors limiting fisheries are identified and corrective measures proposed. After public review and Commission approval, this document will be the guide for management of fishery resources in Idaho from 2001 through 2006. Annual work plans of field and headquarters fisheries managers will be developed within the priorities and framework of the plan.

Budget preparation for fisheries activities of the Department will be within the guidelines of this plan as needed to support annual activities. The Department receives about \$10 million annually from the sale of fishing licenses and the Federal Sport Fish Restoration Program, which places a tax on fishing tackle, equipment, and motorboat fuels and \$13.4 million in "contract" money to implement and evaluate various mitigation programs, primarily for salmon and steelhead. A breakdown of how the Department allocates money for fishery and habitat related programs is illustrated in Figure 1. The Department receives no general state tax money to manage fisheries and aquatic resources. Programs listed are those, which the Department intends to initiate or accomplish within this planning period. A summary of the previous five-year program goals and accomplishments is included (Appendix A).

The Department has management responsibility for 82 species of fish in Idaho, of which 12 species are native game fish. An additional 30 species are game fish that have been introduced (Appendix B). Populations of these fish occur throughout the 26,000 miles of rivers and streams, 225,000 acres of lakes, and 239,000 acres of reservoirs found in the state.

The Idaho Department of Commerce estimates that the recreation and tourism industry is the third largest in the state. Sport fishing comprises a substantial part of this business. In 1996, 483,459 anglers spent more than 4,411,000 angler days fishing in Idaho waters (Maharaj and Carpenter 1997). These anglers spent about \$280 million, which generated an economic output of more than \$461 million and supported almost 7,000 full time jobs. Recently, Reading (1999)

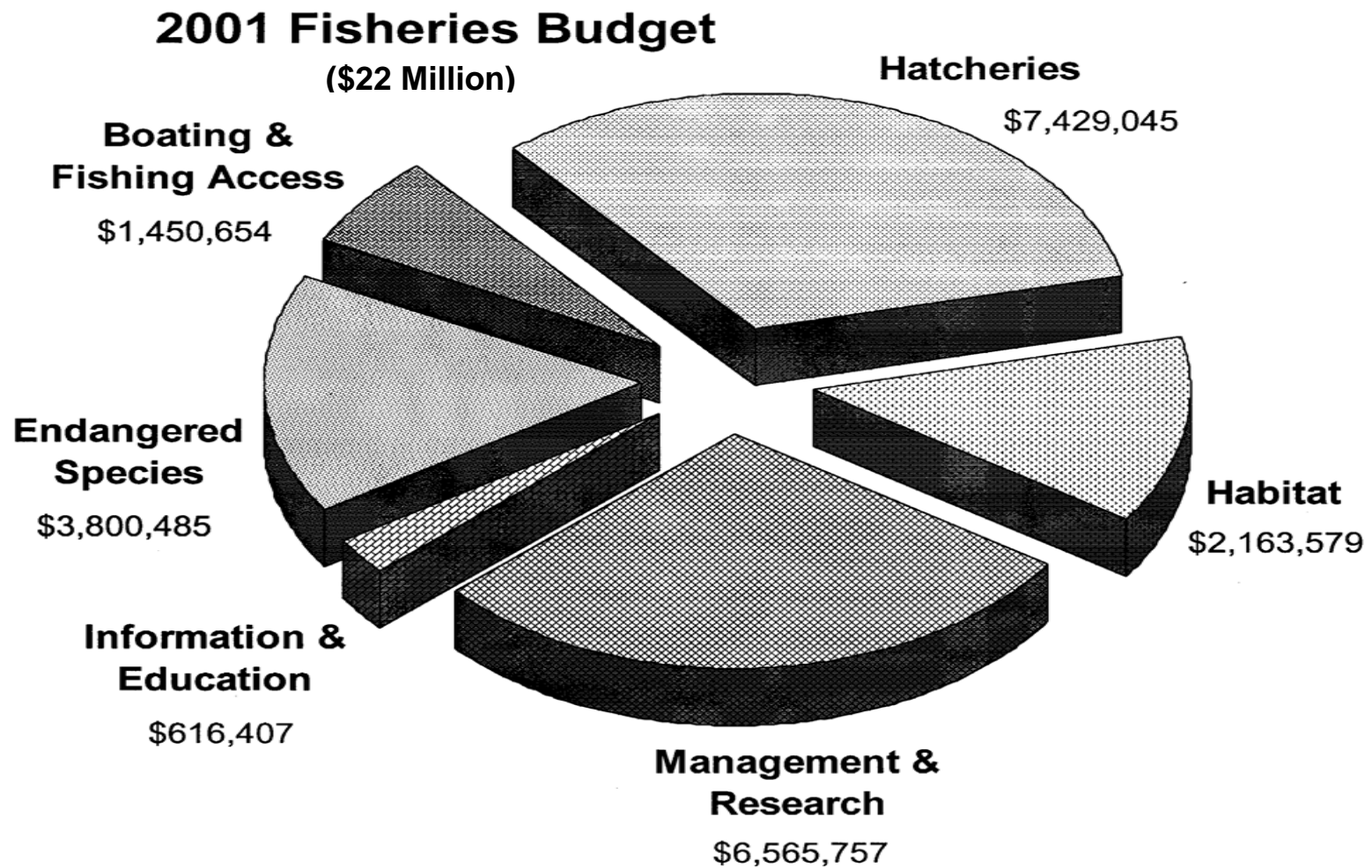


Figure 1. Where fisheries dollars are spent

provided estimates of the existing and potential economic impact of steelhead and salmon fisheries in Idaho. He estimated that restored salmon and steelhead fisheries in Idaho could generate about \$170 million annually in Idaho and support about 5,000 jobs. Reading's estimates were based on evaluations of recent fisheries. The 1992/1993 recreational steelhead fishing season, in which nearly 44,000 steelhead were harvested, generated an economic impact of \$90 million in expenditures and supported nearly 2,700 jobs -- the latter consisting of 1,000+ jobs directly and another 1,600+ indirect jobs. The 1997 Idaho chinook fishing season alone produced roughly \$5.7 million in direct expenditures and a total impact of \$14.5 million. Reading estimated that with restored runs, recreational salmon fishing would produce a total of \$72 million in economic activity and would support more than 2,100 jobs. Most of the economic impact would be generated in some of the state's smallest communities.

Primary fish species from a management standpoint are native sport fish, including rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, steelhead (rainbow trout), chinook salmon, kokanee salmon, whitefish, and white sturgeon. Two of these, steelhead and chinook salmon, migrate to the ocean to complete a portion of their life cycle (i.e., they are "anadromous" species), and thus management of these two species involves cooperative agreements among other state, federal, and tribal agencies. Introduced game fish, such as brown trout, lake trout, brook trout, landlocked coho and chinook salmon, bass, sunfish, perch, crappie, catfish, walleye, northern pike, and tiger muskie, provide sport fisheries where habitat conditions are unsuitable for native species and also provide a diversity of angling opportunity. A small group of fish species, including certain species of gamefish and five species of nongame fish, have been designated as "Species of Special Concern" because of limited range in Idaho, low populations, or threats to their existence.

The major responsibility of Department fisheries activities is to provide continued supplies of game fish for sport anglers. A top priority is to manage populations so that sportfishing demands can be met through natural production of fish species. A wide range of research projects and other information-gathering activities supports management activities. In areas where sufficient fish habitat exists but natural production is insufficient to meet demands, fish stocks may be rebuilt through supplementation. Wherever possible, appropriate wild stocks will be evaluated and utilized in suitable habitat. Hatchery put-grow-and-take and put-and-take programs are primarily used in other heavily-fished, altered habitats to provide recreational fishing opportunity, with emphasis on those areas that will allow a high proportion of hatchery-produced fish to be caught by anglers. A variety of rules are used on different waters to provide a mixture of sport fishing opportunities. New fishing opportunities will be developed through reclamation of damaged habitats and development of new fishing areas.

The six-year focus of the anadromous fish program is to maintain hatchery supported steelhead and chinook salmon fisheries in Idaho and take management actions in Idaho necessary to preserve wild steelhead, chinook, and sockeye salmon. In addition, efforts working toward and promoting improvement of the mainstem Snake River and Columbia River migration route for these fish will continue. These efforts are needed to improve the survival of salmon and steelhead leaving Idaho and returning from the ocean. Improved survival is the key to restoring wild salmon and steelhead runs and the traditional fisheries of the 1960s they supported.

The Department also has responsibility for management of commercial fisheries in Idaho. Commercial fishing in public waters has been limited to nongame fish species and crayfish. These operations are regulated to minimize the potential for affecting sport fisheries.

The Department's Fishery Program is divided into four areas of activities: (1) resident fisheries management, (2) anadromous fisheries management, (3) hatcheries, and (4) fisheries research. Professionally trained fisheries employees are organized into operations sections to accomplish the tasks of each area of activity.

The primary management responsibility of resident and anadromous fisheries management sections is expressed in a mission statement "to preserve and perpetuate the wild, natural, and hatchery fish resources of Idaho, and to provide sustained angling opportunities which provide optimum benefits for a diverse and changing public." Management activities include manipulation of fish populations, fish habitat protection and enhancement, development of angler access and angler information, coordination with the general fishing public, and development of harvest rules. Most of the management effort involves Department field staff (biologists, technicians, and others) working in coordination with headquarters staff, and also with personnel of state and federal land management agencies and Indian tribes as well.

The hatcheries section raises fish to meet particular fishery management goals. New technologies to raise healthy fish in the most cost-effective manner are developed. The hatcheries have a fish health unit designed to identify and treat various fish diseases and to improve the health of particular stocks. Fisheries projects that benefit directly from the hatchery program include put-and-take and put-grow-and-take fish stocking programs, supplementation of salmon and steelhead natural production, supplementation of reduced populations of resident fish, and production of other game fishes.

The fisheries research section serves to enhance management capabilities by providing detailed information on specific fisheries or biological systems to address specific management needs. The mission statement of the section is "to develop and effectively communicate scientifically sound information and tools to enhance the management of Idaho's fisheries." In addition to collecting and analyzing biological data, the fisheries research section aids in the development of management recommendations, development of management methods, and summarizing existing information.

The programmatic function of habitat protection is implemented through the Department's Natural Resources Policy Bureau. Regional fisheries staffs supply data needs and personnel support regional environmental staff biologists and the Natural Resources Policy Bureau.